

Lee committees recommend impact fee suspension, officials question economic effect

By PETE BISHOP

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A proposed two-year suspension of impact fees probably wouldn't result in a flood of new development within Lee County, Community Development Director Mary Gibbs said Tuesday afternoon.

The county's Local Planning Agency, a citizen's advisory committee, recommended a suspension of fees on Monday to help spur the local building industry.

The county's Horizon Council made a similar proposal during its meeting on Friday, Gibbs said.

"There are two schools of thought on that," she said. "Different counties have suspended fees to stimulate economic activity. Will it result in an increase in permits? No, but some say it can create the perception that the county is open for business.

"On the other hand, if you suspend fees you don't have that money for capital improvements and you end up delaying or postponing or taking out projects."

The county charges impact fees to builders to help pay for the added public services such as parks, schools, roads and emergency services that new development will require.

On Tuesday, county commissioners decided to postpone consideration of a new impact fee rate schedule from their March 13 meeting to April 10.

The new fee schedule was developed following a series of reports prepared by county consultants Duncan and Associates, Inc. The reports suggested updates to impact fee schedules for community parks, regional parks, fire services, EMS services and schools.

The county lowered road impact fees by 27 percent last year, Gibbs said.

The proposed schedule raises impact fees for regional parks by 12 percent, but decreases impact fees in most other areas.

"Even though land has decreased in value, the cost of the actual buildings and improvements in the regional parks has gone up," Gibbs said. "It wasn't quite a wash."

School impact fees would decrease by 5 percent for single-family homes and 25 percent for multifamily homes and mobile homes, under the new schedule. Most

emergency services fees would decrease, except for new retail and office buildings, hotels, motels and warehouses.

The net effect of the new schedule would decrease the fees on construction of a new home by about \$500.

For each new single-family home built in the county, builders currently pay \$13,100 in impact fees. Under the new fee structure, builders would pay \$12,600, said Gibbs.

During Tuesday's board meeting, Commissioner Ray Judah said another citizen's advisory group, the Sustainable Communities Committee, should study the issue before commissioners make any decisions.



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